

Abram Games, Graphic Designer
Maximum Meaning, Minimum Means
23 June – 11 August 2007
James Hockey Gallery

Who, especially when born between the Wars, does not recognise the 1950s Cona Rex coffee machine with its elegant simplicity of two glass spheres and handle? Few would have thought that this coffee percolator, redesigned for one-handed use, was constructed and engineered by a graphic designer celebrated internationally for his posters: Abram Games (1914-1996).

Paring down text and image to their distilled essence, the power of his graphic work will be instantly recognisable to many. An apt tribute to his life and career, Maximum Meaning, Minimum Means is an equally fitting summary of this exhibition. An inventor, supreme draughtsman, visual artist and designer, Abram's initial career included working in his father's photographic studio followed by employment, as a studio boy, with the Askew-Younger London commercial design office, only to result in being fired for his rebellious and undisciplined attitude. Abram's stubbornness and dogged dedication would reward him with international success as an independent designer.

Having chosen posters as his artistic medium and métier, Games insisted on taking responsibility for each poster in its entirety: the concept, the slogan, the design and the layout. Typography and image formed a seamless entity. Games was convinced that the power of the poster was the result of treating name as an integral part of the image. Abram Games possessed a grasp of branding far ahead of his time.

The power of simplicity that formed the communicative essence of his work was achieved, however, through a dedication to practice and skill. His many skills included anatomical drawing, honed to perfection at the Royal College of Surgeons. In a speech to the International Design Conference in 1959, Games argued: "A designer must be able to put his heart as well as his mind into his task."

Signing a cheque with an airbrush in a more flamboyant moment illustrates his consummate control over technique. At a time when photography became the artistic medium of choice for artists, such as Man Ray and the photo-montage pioneer John Hartfield, Games preferred to use the photographic image as source material, re-drawing the image with pencil and airbrush.

A range of Abram Games' most famous posters, his tools, and inventions will be on view in this exhibition, which recreates a seminal historical era in the arts. Putting across his creative message, accomplishments, 'Abram Games' awards maximum meaning to his role in the creative evolution in graphic design.

Abram Games was originally organised by the Design Museum, London and the Estate of Abram Games. This exhibition has been made possible by a grant from The Wellcome Trust. The Exhibition Tour has been organised by the Estate of Abram Games.
(www.abramgames.com)